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Empiricism and Rationalism in Nineteenth-Century Histories of Philosophy

Alberto Vanzo

This paper traces the ancestry of a familiar narrative of early modern philosophy, one that dominated the English-speaking world throughout the twentieth century.¹ According to this narrative, which I will call the standard narrative, the early modern period was marked by the development of two rival schools: the rationalism of Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz (DSL) and the empiricism of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume (LBH). Rationalists are said to claim that we have substantive a priori knowledge of the world and, typically, that we have non-empirical concepts. Empiricists claim that all our substantive knowledge of the world and all our concepts are grounded on experience.² The early modern period came to a close once Immanuel

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¹ See, e.g., Robert Adamson, *The Development of Modern Philosophy*, ed. W. R. Sorley (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1903); Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1945); Frederick C. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1946–75), vols. 4–6; the thematic organization of the *Routledge History of Philosophy*, general eds. G. H. R. Parkinson and S. G. Shanker (London: Routledge, 1993–99), vols. 4–6; Roger Scruton, *A Short History of Modern Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002).

² I adopt these characterizations of empiricism and rationalism because they are routinely found in the texts that are the object of this study, e.g., Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann, *Geschichte der Philosophie* (Leipzig: Barth, 1798–1819), vol. 11 (1819), 516; Francis Bowen, *Modern Philosophy* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, and Company, 1877), 164;

Kant, being neither an empiricist nor a rationalist, combined the insights of empiricists and rationalists in his Critical philosophy, starting the new eras of German idealism and late modern philosophy.

Although this narrative is still widespread in textbooks and entrenched in the curriculum, many scholars have rejected it since Louis Loeb and David Fate Norton voiced their misgivings in two influential studies.³ According to its critics, the standard narrative has many flaws: among others, paying too much attention to epistemological issues;⁴ underestimating the importance of debates in other areas, from natural philosophy to politics;⁵ mistaking empiricists for rationalists, rationalists for empiricists, and authors whose thought combines rationalist and empiricist elements for exponents of only one movement;⁶ and creating arbitrary partitions that conceal the degree to which so-called empiricists such as Berkeley and Hume held the same views as so-called rationalists such as Malebranche and Leibniz.⁷

How did the standard narrative manage to pervade histories of philosophy and undergraduate curricula, and become part of the shared assumptions of the Anglophone academic community? Many critics of the standard narrative have raised this question. Since they take it to be deeply flawed, it was incumbent upon them to explain why philosophers came to accept it. They typically claim that the standard narrative became standard in the nineteenth century, that this was due to the influence of specific philosophers and their philosophical agendas, and that those philosophers promoted the standard narrative precisely because it served their agendas. As

John Grier Hibben, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1910), 14. The recent literature has witnessed the appearance of several alternative characterizations of empiricism and distinctions between various kinds of empiricism. See, e.g., Donald Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 29–38; Bas van Fraassen, *The Empirical Stance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002). As a result, how empiricism and rationalism are best defined has become a contentious issue.

³ Louis E. Loeb, *From Descartes to Hume: Continental Metaphysics and the Development of Modern Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981); David Fate Norton, "The Myth of British Empiricism," *History of European Ideas* 1 (1981): 331–44.

⁴ Stephen Gaukroger, *The Collapse of Mechanism and the Rise of Sensibility* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2010), 156.

⁵ Knud Haakonssen, "The Idea of Early Modern Philosophy," in *Teaching New Histories of Philosophy*, ed. J. B. Schneewind (Princeton: University Center for Human Values, 2004), 102, 109–14.

⁶ See, e.g., Desmond M. Clarke, *Descartes' Philosophy of Science* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982) on Descartes's empiricism; Harry M. Bracken, *Berkeley* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974), 15–17, 259, on Berkeley's rationalism.

⁷ See, e.g., Stephen H. Daniel, "The Harmony of the Leibniz-Berkeley Juxtaposition," in

to who those philosophers were, there are vast disagreements. The three most prominent candidates are Thomas Reid;⁸ Immanuel Kant and his disciples, including Kantian historians of philosophy such as Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann⁹ and Kuno Fischer;¹⁰ and “Hegelian idealism in Germany and Great Britain in the second half of the nineteenth century,”¹¹ especially Thomas Hill Green.¹² To Reid, the narrative is said to have furnished a polemical target in “the emergence of skepticism in modern thought.”¹³ To Kant and his followers, the narrative is said to provide “a genealogy of all earlier philosophy whereby certain problems irresolvable in earlier systems can be seen to be finally and definitively resolved only by adopting the Kantian project.”¹⁴ To Hegelians and British idealists, the narrative is said to provide a dialectical account of early modern thought as unfolding from a rationalist thesis, through an empiricist antithesis, to Kant’s Critical synthesis. It is also meant to show that Locke’s empiricism, portrayed as an alternative to idealism, leads to Hume’s skepticism, which must be rejected because it makes “philosophy impossible.”¹⁵

This paper aims to provide a more accurate picture of the spread of the standard narrative. I argue that the narrative did not become standard in the nineteenth century, but at the turn of the twentieth century, between 1895 and 1915. This was not due to the decisive influence of a single author, be it Reid, Kant, Tennemann, Fischer, Green, or other Hegelians. Reid cannot be responsible for the success of the standard narrative because his account of modern thought does not have any of its distinctive features (§1). The standard narrative is, by and large, a *Kantian* narrative. It is based on Kant’s historiographical sketches, as corrected and integrated by Karl Leonhard Reinhold (§2), and it was first fleshed out into full-fledged histories by two Kantian historians, Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann and Johann

Leibniz and the English-Speaking World, ed. Pauline Phemister and Stuart Brown (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), 163–80.

⁸ Norton, “Myth,” 331–33; Haakonssen, “Idea,” 102–8.

⁹ See, e.g., Richard H. Popkin, “Did Hume Ever Read Berkeley?,” *Journal of Philosophy* 56 (1959): 544–45; Haakonssen, “Idea,” 102–3; Gregorio Piaia, “European Identity and National Characteristics in the *Historia philosophica* of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 35 (1996): 602–3.

¹⁰ Gaukroger, *Collapse*, 155.

¹¹ Loeb, *From Descartes*, 30.

¹² Norton, “Myth,” 331–33; Donald Garrett, “Philosophy and History in the History of Modern Philosophy,” in *The Future for Philosophy*, ed. Brian Leiter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 49.

¹³ Haakonssen, “Idea,” 106.

¹⁴ Gaukroger, *Collapse*, 156.

¹⁵ Norton, “Myth,” 333.

Gottlieb Buhle. However, their direct influence on the English-speaking world was modest. Numerous authors, several of whom were not Kantians, spread the narrative in the English-speaking world. Among them are Kuno Fischer, Friedrich Ueberweg, Richard Falckenberg, and Wilhelm Windelband (§3). Some of their works were widely read, but this did not suffice to make the narrative standard in the nineteenth century. From the 1860s to the 1890s, the account of German Hegelians and British idealists was at least as popular as theirs (§3). Since their account differs remarkably from the standard narrative, they neither endorsed nor promoted it, although Green might have facilitated the acceptance of some of its components (§4). I conclude by identifying some of the factors that contributed to the success of the narrative (§5).

I. REID

For Knud Haakonssen and David Fate Norton, one of the most prominent philosophers who contributed to the standard narrative is Thomas Reid. Haakonssen holds that Reid, together with Kant, “laid down” the “epistemological paradigm.” This is a “pattern of philosophical history” that includes the standard narrative as it divides “post-Renaissance philosophy into two major schools or directions—namely, rationalism and empiricism.”¹⁶ In Norton’s view, Reid was the first to develop an account of empiricism by composing “the ‘Locke begat Berkeley, and Berkeley begat Hume’ part” of that narrative.¹⁷ Additionally, according to Haakonssen, Reid promoted the view that philosophy is “concerned essentially with the justification of beliefs and judgments.” “[S]uch justification” is understood “in terms of events, whether perceptive or inferential, in the mind—or as if in the mind—of the individual person.”¹⁸

In this section, I discuss to what extent Reid could have contributed to the spread of the standard narrative. I will not assess Haakonssen’s claim that Reid promoted a view of philosophy as concerned with a certain kind of epistemological justification because one can consistently promote such a view while denying that the development of early modern philosophy is best explained in terms of the standard narrative. For instance, one could agree with Victor Cousin that the main movements of early modern philosophy were not LBH’s empiricism and DSL’s rationalism, but Bacon’s and

¹⁶ Haakonssen, “Idea,” 101, 103.

¹⁷ Norton, “Myth,” 331.

¹⁸ Haakonssen, “Idea,” 101.

Locke's (not Berkeley's or Hume's) *sensualism*, Descartes's and Berkeley's *idealism*, Bayle's and Hume's *skepticism*, and Swedenborg's and Jacobi's *mysticism*.¹⁹

In order to determine Reid's contribution to the narrative, it is helpful to consider four of its distinctive features and establish which of them Reid endorsed. The features are:

- (1) the distinction between empiricism and rationalism;
- (2) the standard groupings of LBH and DSL;
- (3) the claim that later empiricists and rationalists built on premises laid out by their predecessors within their movement. For instance, Berkeley's rejection of material substance and Hume's skepticism towards spiritual substance may be said to derive from Locke's assumptions;
- (4) the claim that Kant's philosophy synthesizes doctrines of the empiricists and the rationalists.

As for (1), the only occurrences of "empiricism," "empiricist," "rationalism," or "rationalist" that I have found in Reid's works are in William Hamilton's nineteenth-century editorial apparatus.²⁰ If Reid's works distinguish between empiricism and rationalism, they use different terms. As a matter of fact, Reid singles out two groups of philosophers. The first group includes the adherents of Descartes's "*ideal system*."²¹ This is the view that we perceive external objects by becoming aware of mental items, which Reid calls ideas. Besides Descartes, Reid focuses on four modern adherents of the ideal system: Locke, Malebranche, Berkeley, and Hume. The second group includes the followers of common sense. Could the two groups be Reid's versions of empiricism and rationalism?

According to the standard narrative, what makes philosophers rationalists or empiricists is whether they claim or deny that we have substantive a priori knowledge of the world and, typically, non-empirical concepts.

¹⁹ Victor Cousin, *Introduction à l'histoire de la philosophie* [1828], in *Oeuvres* (Brussels: Société belge de librairie, 1840–41), 1:1–349; translated as *Introduction to the History of Philosophy*, trans. Henning Gottfried Lindberg (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, Little, Wilkins, 1832); Cousin, *Cours de philosophie* [1829], in *Oeuvres*, 1:353–452; translated as *Course of the History of Modern Philosophy*, trans. O. W. Wright (Edinburgh: Clark, 1852).

²⁰ See, e.g., William Hamilton, "Memoranda for Preface," in *The Works of Thomas Reid*, ed. Hamilton, 6th ed. (Edinburgh: Maclachlan and Stewart, 1863), 1:xv.

²¹ Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*, ed. Derek R. Brookes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996 [1764]), 23.

Reid groups neither the Cartesians nor the supporters of common sense based on their views on these issues. Reid's Cartesians include authors for whom we have substantive a priori knowledge and non-empirical concepts, such as Descartes and Malebranche, as well as authors who deny both claims, such as Locke and Hume. Reid's supporters of common sense are those who, regardless of their views on a priori knowledge and non-empirical concepts, reject a representational theory of perception in favor of direct realism. Hence, Reid's distinction between Cartesians and supporters of common sense is not a version of the empiricism/rationalism distinction. That distinction just cannot be found in Reid's works.

As for (2), although Reid includes LBH among the Cartesians, he includes Descartes and Malebranche in the same category. The second group does not include any of LBH or DSL, but only Reid and whoever, among his readers, accepts his proposals. None of the two groups corresponds even vaguely to those of the standard narrative.

What we do find in Reid's works is something close to (3). According to Reid, after Descartes put forward a representational theory of perception, Malebranche and Locke argued that sensations of secondary qualities "are not resemblances of any thing in bodies."²² Reid takes this claim, combined with the ideal system, to entail that secondary qualities are not "real qualities of body."²³ Berkeley extended this view to all sensible qualities.²⁴ He concluded that, given Descartes's and Locke's assumptions, "no sensation whatever could possibly resemble any quality of an insentient being, such as body is supposed to be."²⁵ Berkeley avoided this conclusion by claiming that material bodies are mental entities. Hume embraced skepticism with regard to the existence of material bodies and extended it to the existence of minds.²⁶

This account of the development of philosophy from Descartes to Hume recalls a common claim of the upholders of the standard narrative at least since Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann. This is the claim that Berkeley's attack on material substance and Hume's attack on spiritual substance are the two stages through which the skepticism inlaid in Locke's views is gradually brought to light. Nevertheless, this view differs from Reid's because Reid does not hold that Hume's idealism depends on any distinctively Lockean or empiricist assumptions. According to Reid, Humean "scepticism

²² Reid, *Inquiry*, 93.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 94; see Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, ed. Knud Haakonssen and Derek R. Brookes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001 [1785]), 156.

²⁵ Reid, *Inquiry*, 209–10.

²⁶ Reid, *Essays*, 162.

is inlaid” in “Des Cartes’ system of the human understanding,” which was “very universally received”²⁷ by “all Philosophers, from *Plato* to Mr *Hume*.”²⁸ The adherents of the standard narrative focus on developments from Descartes to Leibniz and from Locke to Hume. Reid identifies a path to skepticism that cuts across standard partitions and unfolds from Descartes and Malebranche to Berkeley and Hume.

The conclusion of Reid’s narrative is that we can avoid skepticism by abandoning the ideal system and endorsing common sense philosophy. Some followers of the standard narrative make a similar claim, namely, that Kant avoided Humean skepticism by developing his Critical philosophy. Despite this analogy with the standard narrative, Reid’s account of modern thought includes neither (4), nor any claim analogous to it. Reid never mentions Kant and he does not favor a higher synthesis of opposed standpoints. He utterly rejects one of them, the ideal system, and endorses its opposite, common sense philosophy.

On the whole, despite some similarities between Reid’s account and the standard narrative, Reid endorses none of its four distinctive features. Even if, as Haakonssen claims, Reid promoted certain broad attitudes towards philosophy that are shared by the standard narrative, he cannot be responsible for the success of that specific narrative, as opposed to others, because he does not endorse its distinctive features.

II. KANT AND REINHOLD

Kant’s works contain several elements of the standard narrative. Kant contrasts empiricism with what he calls noologism and, later, rationalism.²⁹ He classes Leibniz as a rationalist, Locke and Hume as empiricists, and he interprets some of their doctrines in the light of their empiricism or rationalism.³⁰ Nevertheless, as I argued elsewhere,³¹ Kant’s texts depart from the standard narrative in significant respects. Most notably, Kant does not regard Bacon or Berkeley as empiricists and Descartes, Malebranche, or

²⁷ Reid, *Inquiry*, 12, 23.

²⁸ Reid, *Essays*, 105, see 132.

²⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* [1781/1787], in *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: Reimer/de Gruyter, 1900–), 3:A854/B882; Kant, *Welches sind die wirklichen Fortschritte, die die Metaphysik [. . .] gemacht hat?* [1793], in *Gesammelte Schriften*, 20:275.

³⁰ Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, 3:A854/B882; *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, 5:13, 50–53.

³¹ Alberto Vanzo, “Kant on Empiricism and Rationalism,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (2013): 53–74.

Spinoza as rationalists. He does not provide any account of the development of rationalism. He regards himself as a particular kind of rationalist, rather than a synthesizer of empiricism and rationalism as such. Kant's early supporters and opponents viewed Kant in the same way as they disputed the superiority of Lockean empiricism or Kantian *rationalism*.³²

The first author to place Kant over and above empiricism and rationalism was Karl Leonhard Reinhold. After emerging as a prominent advocate of Kant's philosophy in the late 1780s, Reinhold developed his own Kant-inspired system, Elementary Philosophy, from 1790 to 1794. Following Kant, Reinhold held that Locke and Leibniz "laid down, one in the simple representations drawn from experience and the other in innate representations," "the only foundation of philosophical knowledge possible for the empiricists and the rationalists."³³ Yet for Reinhold, in contrast to Kant, the conflict between their views did not give way to a higher, Critical form of rationalism. It prompted a skeptical crisis, which was overcome with the appearance of a "*fully new*"³⁴ philosophical standpoint: "The insufficiency of *empiricism* brought about *rationalism*, and the insufficiency of the latter sustained the other in turn. *Humean skepticism* unveiled the insufficiency of both of these dogmatic systems, and thus occasioned *Kantian criticism*."³⁵ Kant's criticism "*unifies* the acclaimed but contradictory viewpoints from which *Locke* and *Leibniz* investigated the human spirit."³⁶ It puts "together whatever truth there is in Locke's empiricism and in Leibniz's rationalism,"³⁷ while avoiding the pitfalls of skepticism. It carries out an *Aufhebung* of empiricism and rationalism, in the three Hegelian meanings of the term: it *goes beyond* those positions, while *removing* their errors and *retaining* their correct insights.

Since Kant's and, to a greater extent, Reinhold's works provide the foundation of the standard narrative, we should ask if their direct influence

³² See, e.g., Christian Gottlieb Selle, "De la réalité et l'idéalité des objets de nos connoissances," *Memoires de l'Académie Royale des Sciences et Belles-Lettres* (1786–87), 577–612.

³³ Karl Leonhard Reinhold, *Über das Fundament des philosophischen Wissens* [1791], in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Martin Bondeli (Basel: Schwabe, 2007–), 4:44, trans. in *Between Kant and Hegel*, ed. George di Giovanni and H. S. Harris (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985), 52–103.

³⁴ "[V]öllig neue." Reinhold, *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie*, vol. 1 [1790], in *Gesammelte Schriften*, 2.1:107.

³⁵ Reinhold, *Fundament*, 132.

³⁶ "[. . .] vereinigt die großen aber einander entgegen gesetzten Gesichtspunkte, aus welchen *Locke* und *Leibnitz* den menschlichen Geist untersucht haben." Reinhold, *Briefe*, 107.

³⁷ Reinhold, *Fundament*, 56.

determined its spread in the English-speaking world. There are four reasons to rule this out. First, neither Kant nor Reinhold provided more than mere sketches of history. Their influence was limited by the fact that they never developed detailed accounts of early modern thought.

Second, Kant's and Reinhold's immediate influence declined significantly from the mid-1790s onward. Reinhold himself abandoned Elementary Philosophy for Fichte's idealism around 1795. With the tide turning in favor of Fichte's, Schelling's, and Hegel's systems, Kantianism and Elementary Philosophy went out of fashion even in Germany.

Third, British culture became nearly impermeable to German influence from the late 1790s to the late 1820s. This was, to a significant extent, the result of a vigorous campaign that British conservatives mounted against German intellectuals. They attacked Goethe, Lessing, and Schiller in various periodicals like the *Anti-Jacobin Review*. They accused Samuel Taylor Coleridge of being a Jacobin for his trip to Germany in 1798–99 and for his translation of Schiller's *Wallenstein*, which received unanimously negative reviews.³⁸ In this context, Kant and his followers were regarded as uninteresting, obscure authors who were not worth studying. Dugald Stewart's statements are exemplary at this regard. In Stewart's view, Cudworth's distinction between sensibility and understanding is "far superior" to Kant's, "both in point of perspicuity and of precision."³⁹ As for the analysis "of the origins of our most important *simple notions*," not "much progress has hitherto been made by the German metaphysicians," whereas a "great deal certainly has been accomplished by the late Dr. Reid."⁴⁰ Kant's ethics resembles Kames's, Beattie's, and Oswald's, but it is "infinitely more exceptionable than theirs."⁴¹

Fourth, Reinhold's works were not translated and his Elementary Philosophy went unnoticed in the British Isles. Kant found a few propagandists and expositors, but their achievements were for the most part very modest.⁴² Two exceptions are Henry Crabb Robinson and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Robinson's short pieces on Kant were valuable. However, being

³⁸ Giuseppe Micheli, "The Early Reception of Kant's Thought in England 1785–1805," in *Kant and His Influence*, ed. George MacDonald Ross and Tony McWalter (Bristol: Thoemmes, 1990), 293–95.

³⁹ Dugald Stewart, *Dissertation exhibiting the Progress of Metaphysical, Ethical and Political Philosophy* [1815–21], in *Collected Works*, ed. William Hamilton (Edinburgh: Constable, 1854), 1:400.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 412.

⁴² René Wellek, *Immanuel Kant in England, 1793–1838* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1931), 28–51, 164.

published in the “obscure” and “unattractive” *Monthly Review*,⁴³ they had no impact. Coleridge, who had first-hand knowledge of Kant, praised him in the *Biographia literaria* of 1816 and employed Kantian ideas in his correspondence and some published writings.⁴⁴ However, these were not strictly philosophical works. While they influenced Anglican theologians, their impact on British philosophers was negligible. Among Coleridge’s philosophical works, the manuscripts of his lectures on the history of philosophy were published only in 1949.⁴⁵ Although they draw from Tennemann’s Kant-inspired historiography, they do not employ the notions of empiricism and rationalism.

It is only from the 1830s, when Britain opened itself to cultural influences from the Continent, that Kant’s views on the history of modern thought could influence British writers. William Hamilton, the first British philosopher who “genuinely assimilated some of Kant’s thoughts and appropriated some of his ideas,” published his first piece on Kant in 1829.⁴⁶ Around 1830, Thomas Carlyle published an influential set of papers on German thought and literature that contributed to rising interest in Kant’s philosophy. William Whewell introduced Kantian views in Cambridge in the 1830s.⁴⁷ More importantly for our purposes, the first English edition of Tennemann’s *Manual of the History of Philosophy* was published in 1832.⁴⁸ Despite being poorly translated and omitting several sections of the original, this volume made the Kant-inspired narrative of early modern thought available to Anglophone readers. Several Kantian works were published in the late 1830s, including the first complete translation of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which contains Kant’s comments on the history of empiricism and rationalism.

The rise of interest in Kant’s ideas and the wider availability of his works in the 1830s and 1840s cannot explain how the standard narrative came to dominate English histories of philosophy. As can be seen from table 1, several alternative historiographical narratives spread in the 1830s and 1840s. As a result, in the mid-1850s a learned British reader could hold, with Dugald Stewart and Thomas Morell, that the central development of

⁴³ Ibid., 143.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 75–76, 111.

⁴⁵ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Works*, vol. 8, *Lectures 1818–1819*, ed. J. R. de J. Jackson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁴⁶ Welck, *Kant*, 51.

⁴⁷ Micheli, “Reception,” 203.

⁴⁸ Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann, *Grundriß der Geschichte der Philosophie*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig: Barth, 1816); translated as *A Manual of the History of Philosophy*, trans. Arthur Johnson (Oxford: Talboys, 1832), rev. J. R. Morell (London: Bohn, 1852).

the early modern period was the triumph of experimental philosophy.⁴⁹ One could follow George Henry Lewes in regarding the early modern period as a series of failed attempts to develop a metaphysics, which ended in a skepticism from which neither Reid nor Kant managed to escape.⁵⁰ One could favor Frederick Denison Maurice's strictly chronological arrangement,⁵¹ or hold that the modern period was dominated by the schools of Bacon, Descartes, and Leibniz;⁵² by Cartesianism, Lockean realism, and Berkeley's idealism;⁵³ by sensualism, idealism, materialism, and skepticism;⁵⁴ or by LBH's empiricism and DSL's rationalism. It would take several decades for the standard narrative to prevail over its competitors.

III. KANTIAN HISTORIANS: TENNEMANN AND FISCHER

It is often claimed that neither Kant nor Reinhold but the "German historians of philosophy of the late 18th and early 19th century constructed the historical past of contemporary [Anglophone] philosophy" by spelling out the standard narrative.⁵⁵ Two historians could have played this role: Johann Gottlieb Buhle and Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann. At the turn of the nineteenth century, these authors fleshed out Reinhold's historical sketches into detailed accounts of early modern philosophy based on the distinction between empiricism and rationalism. These are the first histories of early modern thought that resemble well-known twentieth-century accounts such as those by Bertrand Russell and Frederick Copleston.⁵⁶

In the same years, another author, Joseph-Marie Degérando, published a multivolume history of philosophy that employs the notions of empiricism and rationalism. However, Degérando's account looks less familiar to

⁴⁹ Stewart, *Dissertation*; Thomas Morell, *Elements of the History of Philosophy and Science* (London: Holdsworth, 1827).

⁵⁰ George Henry Lewes, *A Biographical History of Philosophy* (London: Cox, 1845–46).

⁵¹ Frederick Denison Maurice, "Moral and Metaphysical Philosophy," in *Encyclopædia metropolitana* (London, 1840), 2:45–674.

⁵² Louis Eugène Marie Bautain, *An Epitome of the History of Philosophy*, trans. C. S. Henry (New York: Harper, 1841). Joseph-Marie Degérando proposed the same classification four decades earlier. See his *Histoire comparée des systèmes de philosophie relativement aux principes des connaissances humaines* (Paris: Henrichs, 1804).

⁵³ Albert Schwegler, *A History of Philosophy in Epitome*, trans. Julius H. Seelye (New York: Appleton, 1856).

⁵⁴ Cousin, *Cours*.

⁵⁵ Popkin, "Hume," 544–45.

⁵⁶ Johann Gottlieb Buhle, *Lehrbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1796–1804); Buhle, *Geschichte der neuern Philosophie* (Göttingen: Mittwe/Röwe, 1800–1805); Tennemann, *Geschichte*; Tennemann, *Grundriß*.

current-day readers than those by Tennemann and Buhle. Degérando relies on two other conceptual pairs (dogmatism and skepticism, materialism and idealism), besides empiricism and rationalism. He identifies not two but three main groupings of early modern authors: Bacon's, Descartes's, and Leibniz's schools. He grafts the notions of empiricism and rationalism into an account that praises eclecticism and promotes an "experimental philosophy" inspired by Bacon and Condillac. He surveys the history of philosophy twice, first chronologically and then systematically, on the basis of his taxonomy of philosophical systems.⁵⁷ Buhle's and Tennemann's histories, instead, do not have any of these unusual features. Was the spread of the standard narrative in the English-speaking world due to their influence?

Between Buhle and Tennemann, only the latter was influential in Great Britain—not for his interesting, twelve-volume *History of Philosophy*, but for his brief *Manual of the History of Philosophy*. This work identifies empiricism and rationalism as the main early modern movements. It classifies LBH (along with Bacon and Hobbes) as empiricists and DSL (along with Malebranche) as rationalists. It claims that Berkeley and Hume built on Lockean premises, whereas Spinoza and Leibniz followed "the speculative direction of the Cartesian school."⁵⁸ It portrays Kant as the philosopher who went beyond these movements and reached a "higher point of view."⁵⁹ Its French translation by Victor Cousin had wide circulation throughout Europe and even in North America.⁶⁰ Its poor English translation of 1832 was followed by an improved English edition that appeared in 1852 and was reprinted at least three times in the 1870s.⁶¹

The popularity of Tennemann's textbook plays some part in explaining why the standard narrative of early modern thought became widespread. However, as table 1 shows, Tennemann is only one of several historians who embraced the standard narrative, at a time when it was competing with several alternatives. Among the adherents of the standard narrative, Kuno Fischer is often seen as the real source of the standard historiography. For instance, Stephen Gaukroger claims that Fischer "supplied the definitive version of the modern account of the development of philosophy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."⁶² He holds that the empiricism/

⁵⁷ Degérando, *Histoire comparée*.

⁵⁸ Tennemann, *Grundriß*, 289.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 355.

⁶⁰ Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann, *Manuel de l'histoire de la philosophie*, trans. Victor Cousin (Paris: Pichon et Didier, 1829).

⁶¹ See table 2.

⁶² Stephen Gaukroger, *Descartes: An Intellectual Biography* (1995; repr., Oxford: Clarendon, 2003), 6.

Decade	Nr.	Experimental philosophy	Cousin's narrative	Standard narrative	Positivist narrative	Hegelian narrative	Original narratives
1810s	1	Stewart 1815					
1820s	1	T. Morell 1827					
1830s	2		Cousin 1832	Tennemann 1832			
1840s	4		J. D. Morell 1846		Lewes 1845–46		Maurice 1840 Bautain 1841
1850s	3		Cousin 1852	Tennemann 1852		Schwegler 1856	
1860s	2					Schwegler 1867	Maurice 1862
1870s	4			Ueberweg 1872–73	Lefèvre 1879		Haven 1876 Bowen 1877
1880s	3		J. D. Morell 1884	Bax 1886			Mahan 1883
1890s	7			Burt 1892 Falckenberg 1893 Windelband 1893 Weber 1896		Erdmann 1889–90 Hegel 1892–96	Bascom 1893

TABLE 1: Histories of philosophy, published in English in the nineteenth century, which contain discussions of early modern philosophy. Only first editions are recorded, including English translations of foreign works. The nineteenth-century reprints of an eighteenth-century work, Brucker/Enfield's *History of Philosophy* (1791), are not included. Lewes's *History of Philosophy from Thales to Comte* (1871) is not included because it is not a new work, but an enlarged version of his *Biographic History of Philosophy* (1845–46). The table does not include histories of philosophy published as journal articles or book chapters. Full bibliographic details of the works cited in the tables are provided in the appendix on pp. 280–82.

rationalism distinction, “as it has been employed since the mid-nineteenth century, derives” not from Tennemann, but from Fischer’s “Kantian-inspired historiography.”⁶³

Fischer’s account of modern philosophy displays the four distinctive features of the standard narrative mentioned above. It was developed in a series of ten lengthy monographs published between 1852 and 1898. While Fischer’s first two monographs emphasize the contrast between empiricism or realism and idealism, his later works revolve around the contrast between empiricism and rationalism.⁶⁴ The first four and a half volumes cover the ground from Bacon to Kant. Only parts of them were translated into English: the shorter version of the volume on Bacon, the two volumes on Descartes and his disciples, and portions of those on Spinoza and Kant.⁶⁵

⁶³ Gaukroger, *Collapse*, 155.

⁶⁴ Compare *Das classische Zeitalter der dogmatischen Philosophie* (Mannheim: Bassermann & Mathy, 1854), 91, with *Descartes und seine Schule* (Munich: Basserman, 1878–80), pt. 1, 143.

⁶⁵ See Kuno Fischer, *Francis Bacon of Verulam: Realistic Philosophy and Its Age*, trans.

As for Fischer's interpretations of Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume, Anglophone readers could only read the brief overviews offered in the last chapter of the book on Bacon. They had no access to Fischer's views on Leibniz and on substantial portions of Spinoza's and Kant's philosophies.

Given that much of Fischer's history of modern philosophy was not translated into English and that few Anglophone readers could read German, Fischer's works alone cannot have "supplied"⁶⁶ the standard narrative to English-speaking readers. Fischer's influence was also limited by the fact that his works were too detailed and advanced to be used as textbooks. Fischer himself warned those approaching his volumes that they better served the learned than the learner.⁶⁷

This is not to say that Fischer's works had no influence whatsoever on the spread of the standard narrative. German historians such as Falckenberg and Ueberweg, whose works were translated into English in the 1870s and 1880s, had read Fischer's works. Moreover, some Anglophone authors of standard histories of philosophy were familiar with Fischer's German works. John Hibben makes several references to them and Paul Thilly studied in Heidelberg with Fischer.⁶⁸ However, Fischer's influence should not be overestimated. As we shall see in section 5, it is only at the turn of the twentieth century, between 1895 and 1915, that the standard narrative became standard. The references, bibliographies, and suggested readings of the histories of philosophy published in those years contain several mentions of historians who follow the standard narrative, typically including Falckenberg and Windelband. Yet they contain few mentions of Fischer.⁶⁹ It was not only or mainly Fischer, but a number of historians who collectively "supplied"⁷⁰ the standard narrative to Anglophone readers.

John Oxenford (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, & Roberts, 1857); Fischer, *Descartes and His School*, ed. Noah Porter (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1887); Fischer, "The Life and Character of Baruch Spinoza," trans. in *Spinoza: Four Essays*, ed. William A. Knight (London: Williams and Norgate, 1882), 75–127; Fischer, *A Commentary on Kant's Critick of the Pure Reason*, trans. John Pentland Mahaffy (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1866); Fischer, *A Critique of Kant*, trans. W. S. Hough (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1888).

⁶⁶ Gaukroger, *Descartes*, 6.

⁶⁷ Fischer, *Zeitalter*, iv.

⁶⁸ Hibben, *Enlightenment*; "Guide to the Frank Thilly Papers, 1889–1935," the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library (August 2009), collection no. 14–21–623, <http://rmc.library.cornell.edu/EAD/htmldocs/RMA00623.html> (archived at <http://www.webcitation.org/6ZBEMZp2F>).

⁶⁹ See, e.g., Walter T. Marvin, *A Syllabus of an Introduction to Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1899), vi, and the references in Herbert Ernest Cushman, *A Beginner's History of Philosophy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1910–11), 2:17.

⁷⁰ Gaukroger (*Descartes*, 6) employs this term with reference to Fischer.

Decade	No.	Experimental philosophy	Cousin's narrative	Standard narrative	Positivist narrative	Hegelian narrative	Original narratives
1810s	2	Stewart 1815 Stewart 1815 ¹⁸¹⁷					
1820s	2	T. Morell 1827 Stewart 1815 ¹⁸²⁹					
1830s	3	Stewart 1815 ¹⁸³⁵	Cousin 1832	Tennemann 1832			
1840s	10	Stewart 1815 ¹⁸⁴²	J. D. Morell 1846 J. D. Morell 1846 ¹⁸⁴⁷ J. D. Morell 1846 ¹⁸⁴⁸		Lewes 1845–46		Maurice 1840 Bautain 1841 Bautain 1841 ¹⁸⁴² Bautain 1841 ¹⁸⁴⁶ Maurice 1840 ¹⁸⁴⁷
1850s	11	Stewart 1815 ¹⁸⁵⁴	Cousin 1852 Cousin 1852 ¹⁸⁵⁴ Cousin 1852 ¹⁸⁵⁷	Tennemann 1852	Lewes 1845–46 ¹⁸⁵² Lewes 1845–46 ¹⁸⁵⁷	Schwegler 1856 Schwegler 1856 ^{2nd ed., 1856}	Bautain 1841 ¹⁸⁵⁵ Bautain 1841 ¹⁸⁵⁶
1860s	13	Stewart 1815 ¹⁸⁶⁰	Cousin 1852 ¹⁸⁶⁰ Cousin 1852 ¹⁸⁶² Cousin 1852 ¹⁸⁶⁶		Lewes 1845–46 ¹⁸⁶⁸	Schwegler 1856 ¹⁸⁶⁰ Schwegler 1856 ¹⁸⁶⁴ Schwegler 1856 ¹⁸⁶⁶ Schwegler 1867 Schwegler 1867 ¹⁸⁶⁸ Schwegler 1856 ¹⁸⁶⁹	Maurice 1862 Bautain 1841 ¹⁸⁶⁹
1870s	25	Stewart 1815 ¹⁸⁷⁷		Tennemann 1852 ¹⁸⁷⁰ Ueberweg 1872–73 ¹⁸⁷³ Tennemann 1852 ¹⁸⁷³ Ueberweg 1872–73 ¹⁸⁷⁶ Ueberweg 1872–73 ¹⁸⁷⁷ Tennemann 1852 ¹⁸⁷⁸	Lewes 1845–46 ¹⁸⁷¹ Lewes 1845–46 ¹⁸⁷² Lefèvre 1879	Schwegler 1867 ¹⁸⁷¹ Schwegler 1867 ¹⁸⁷² Schwegler 1856 ¹⁸⁷⁴ , 1867 ¹⁸⁷⁴ Schwegler 1856 ¹⁸⁷⁶ Schwegler 1856 ¹⁸⁷⁷ , 1867 ¹⁸⁷⁷ Schwegler 1856 ¹⁸⁷⁹ , 1867 ¹⁸⁷⁹	Maurice 1862 ¹⁸⁷² Maurice 1862 ¹⁸⁷³ Bautain 1841 ¹⁸⁷⁴ Haven 1876 Bowen 1877 Bowen 1877 ¹⁸⁷⁸
1880s	23		J. D. Morell 1884	Ueberweg 1872–73 ¹⁸⁸⁰ Ueberweg 1872–73 ¹⁸⁸⁵ Bax 1886 Ueberweg 1872–73 ¹⁸⁸⁷ Bax 1886 ¹⁸⁸⁸ Ueberweg 1872–73 ¹⁸⁸⁸ Ueberweg 1872–73 ¹⁸⁸⁹		Schwegler 1856 ¹⁸⁸⁰ , 1867 ^{8th ed., n.d., 1880} Schwegler 1856 ¹⁸⁸¹ Schwegler 1856 ¹⁸⁸² Schwegler 1856 ¹⁸⁸⁴ , 1867 ^{9th ed., n.d., 1884} Schwegler 1856 ¹⁸⁸⁶ Schwegler 1856 ¹⁸⁸⁷ Schwegler 1856 ¹⁸⁸⁸ , 1867 ^{10th ed., n.d., 1888} Schwegler 1867 ^{11th ed., n.d., 1889}	Maurice 1862 ¹⁸⁸² Mahan 1883 Bowen 1877 ¹⁸⁸⁵ Bowen 1877 ¹⁸⁸⁹
1890s	32			Ueberweg 1872–73 ¹⁸⁹⁰ Burt 1892 Ueberweg 1872–73 ¹⁸⁹² Falckenberg 1893 Windelband 1893 Falckenberg 1893 ¹⁸⁹⁵ Windelband 1893 ¹⁸⁹⁵ Weber 1896 Windelband 1893 ¹⁸⁹⁶ Falckenberg 1893 ¹⁸⁹⁷ Weber 1896 ¹⁸⁹⁷ Weber 1896 ¹⁸⁹⁸ Windelband 1893 ¹⁸⁹⁸ Weber 1896 ¹⁸⁹⁹	Lewes 1845–46 ¹⁸⁹²	Erdmann 1889–90 Schwegler 1856 ¹⁸⁹⁰ Schwegler 1867 ^{12th ed., n.d., 1890} Schwegler 1856 ¹⁸⁹¹ Erdmann 1889–90 ¹⁸⁹² Schwegler 1856 ¹⁸⁹² Erdmann 1889–90 ¹⁸⁹³ Schwegler 1856 ¹⁸⁹³ Schwegler 1856 ¹⁸⁹⁴ Hegel 1892–1896 Schwegler 1856 ¹⁸⁹⁶ Erdmann 1889–90 ^{1897–99} Schwegler 1856 ¹⁸⁹⁹ Schwegler 1867 ^{13th ed., n.d., 1890s} , 14th ed., n.d., 1890s	Maurice 1862 ¹⁸⁹⁰ Bascom 1893

TABLE 2: Texts mentioned in table 1, their reprints and later editions. Subscripted numbers indicate publication years of reprints and later editions.

The publication of several histories that follow the narrative did not suffice to make it standard. As table 1 shows, most of the new histories of philosophy published in the 1890s follow the standard narrative. This may lead one to think that, perhaps due to the influence of Tennemann's, Fischer's, and Ueberweg's histories, the standard narrative was firmly prevailing by the 1890s. However, things look different if we consider not only first editions, but also later editions and reprints. These are included in table 2. In each decade from 1850 to 1900, more histories of philosophy that followed the Hegelian narrative were published or reprinted than those that followed the standard narrative. The two English translations of Albert Schwegler's Hegelian *History of Philosophy in Epitome*, published in Edinburgh and New York, were reprinted 36 times, far more than any other history of philosophy.⁷¹

The unprecedented success of Schwegler's *History* on both sides of the

⁷¹ Its American translation (Schwegler, *History*) was reprinted 23 times in the nineteenth

Atlantic explains why no new Hegelian histories of philosophy were published in the 1870s and 1880s, while British idealism was in full swing. This is not due to a lack of interest in Hegel's narrative, but to the virtues of Schwegler's *History*. It is well written, accessible to students and laypeople, and short enough to be used as a textbook. Its pronounced Hegelian narrative is in line with the idealist tendencies that were gaining popularity in the second half of the century. In the light of these features and its many reprints, we should not be surprised by a historian's claim that "[b]y far the most popular history of philosophy" in the 1880s was not one by Tennemann or Fischer, but "that of Albert Schwegler."⁷² The success of Hegelian histories shows that, despite the wide availability of histories based on the standard narrative, that narrative was not yet standard by the 1890s. If that had been the case, Hegelian histories would have been far less widespread than they were.

Despite the many reprints of Hegelian histories, more new histories of early modern philosophy followed the standard narrative than the Hegelian narrative during the 1890s. However, they did not do as much to spread the standard narrative as the Hegelian histories did to spread their favored narrative. This is because, while the Hegelian narrative was very pronounced in the three histories of philosophy that followed it, most histories that followed the standard narrative did not emphasize it⁷³ or combined it with original features that obscured it. For instance, Benjamin Burt's *History of Modern Philosophy* discusses many philosophers beyond the empiricist and rationalist triads.⁷⁴ He singles out a third, "intuitionalist" movement alongside empiricism and rationalism. He holds that some authors (such as Richard Cumberland and Samuel Clarke) combined empiricist and rationalist elements. He does not include others (e.g., Richard Price) in any movement. He does not portray Kant's philosophy as the crowning of the early modern period, but as one of several philosophical options that were available after the late eighteenth century.

If we look at the historical overviews published in texts other than histories of philosophy, such as journal articles and monographs, we can

century. Its British translation (*Handbook of the History of Philosophy*, trans. James Hutchison Stirling [Edinburgh: Edmonston & Douglas, 1867]) was reprinted 13 times.

⁷² Ernest Belfort Bax, *A Handbook of the History of Philosophy* (London: Bell, 1886), 12.

⁷³ Richard Falckenberg, *History of Modern Philosophy*, trans. A. C. Armstrong, Jr. (New York: Holt, 1893); Wilhelm Windelband, *A History of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1893).

⁷⁴ See Benjamin Chapman Burt, *A History of Modern Philosophy* (Chicago: McClurg, 1892).

easily find original accounts.⁷⁵ Philosophers writing in the 1880s and 1890s were keenly aware of the many variations that could be found in the histories of their subject. Nicholas Murray Butler stressed such variations in an article of 1886: “Bacon and Descartes are the universally acknowledged pioneers of modern thought . . . As to the line of development from Bacon and Descartes, various historians take very different views, and no two find exactly the same sequence or use precisely the same nomenclature . . .”⁷⁶ Butler sketches various ways of carving the early modern period. Having noted that the classification based on the empiricism/rationalism distinction has the advantage of simplicity, he states that he favors the Hegelian classification without ever explaining why. This shows that, at that time, there was the sense that alternative historiographical narratives could be applied. None was taken to be, as a matter of course, the one that captured the *real* schools or movements that shaped the early modern period.

IV. GERMAN HEGELIANS AND BRITISH IDEALISTS

The popularity of Hegelian histories until the end of the nineteenth century lends plausibility to Louis Loeb’s view that the rise of the standard narrative was due to the combined influence of Kuno Fischer’s works and those of the German Hegelians and British idealists, especially Thomas Hill Green.⁷⁷ More recently, Don Garrett has claimed that “British Idealist historians of philosophy (particularly Green)” developed the standard narrative. They

elaborated a narrative according to which early modern philosophy had consisted of two schools or movements: the “Continental Rationalism” of Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz; and the “British Empiricism” of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. These movements were then synthesized, on this account, by the critical philosophy of Kant, which thereby superceded them.⁷⁸

According to Loeb and Garrett, Green elaborated the standard narrative in his widely read “General Introduction” to Hume’s *Treatise*, published in

⁷⁵ See, e.g., Wm. T. Harris, “The History of Philosophy,” *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 10 (1876): 225–70.

⁷⁶ Nicholas Murray Butler, “The Problem of Kant’s ‘Kritik der reinen Vernunft,’” *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 20 (1886): 56–57.

⁷⁷ Loeb, *From Descartes*, 31.

⁷⁸ Garrett, “Philosophy,” 49; see Norton, “Myth,” 332–33.

1874.⁷⁹ However, as Alexander Klein has argued, our familiar categories of empiricism and rationalism are foreign to Green's introduction.⁸⁰ Klein notes that Green's introduction never groups together even two among Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz, let alone all three. Green's only mention of Spinoza relates him to Berkeley.⁸¹ The few mentions of Leibniz relate him to Hume and Kant, but not to Descartes or Spinoza.⁸² Green mentions rationalism only once, when he praises Locke's and Hume's "readiness to follow the lead of Ideas: their spirit was the spirit of Rationalism—the spirit which, however baffled and forced into inconsistent admissions, is still governed by the faith that all things may ultimately be understood."⁸³

This is hardly what philosophers mean when they call DSL Continental rationalists and contrast them with British empiricists. Looking at the latter, Green's 299-page introduction does not call anyone an empiricist. It employs the term "empiricism" four times,⁸⁴ always in passing and always with reference to Locke, never to Berkeley or Hume. Those four sentences provide neither a perspicuous characterization of empiricism, nor one that could be used to single out LBH and contrast them with DSL.⁸⁵

Even if Green does not call LBH empiricists, he does group LBH together in the introduction. He explains that Locke took ideas to be copies of material things. Berkeley got rid of that assumption and regarded God as the cause of our ideas.⁸⁶ Hume deemed that assumption unnecessary and provided yet another revision of Locke's views.⁸⁷ This is an account of how Locke begat Berkeley and Berkeley begat Hume, analogous to the account provided by Tennemann, Fischer, and other adherents of the standard narrative. However, unlike them, Green does not focus on Locke's, Berkeley's, and Hume's views on ideas to criticize their empiricist assumptions. Green never denies that all our substantive knowledge derives from experience, nor does he claim that we have non-empirical concepts. He criticizes Locke's, Hume's, and (more briefly) Berkeley's views on ideas on another ground, namely, because they do not acknowledge the contribution of the

⁷⁹ Thomas Hill Green, "General Introduction," in *Works*, ed. R. L. Nettleship (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1894), 1:1–299.

⁸⁰ Alexander Mugar Klein, *The Rise of Empiricism: William James, Thomas Hill Green, and the Struggle over Psychology* (PhD dissertation, Indiana University, 2007), <http://hdl.handle.net/2022/7770> (archived at <http://www.webcitation.org/6ZInyg6Vx>), 36–51.

⁸¹ Green, "Introduction," 292.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 2, 3.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 98, 99, 185, 188.

⁸⁵ Klein, *Empiricism*, 41–46.

⁸⁶ Green, "Introduction," 133.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 159.

understanding to cognition. According to Green, although the understanding does not furnish us with any substantive a priori knowledge and does not generate non-empirical concepts, it does elaborate the information provided by the senses. The importance of this activity is hard to overstate. Our cognitions of the world are not generated by the senses alone, but by the operations that the understanding performs on the deliverances of the senses. LBH attempted to explain how we cognize the world “from sensation alone,” disregarding the contribution of the understanding. They overlooked the fact that “in experience we already go beyond sense.”⁸⁸ They failed to explain how we derive cognitions from sensations and paved the way for skepticism.⁸⁹

Green does not portray his attack against LBH as an attack against their epistemology,⁹⁰ but against their cognitive psychology, which he calls “empirical psychology.”⁹¹ Green regards LBH as the ancestors of the empirical psychologists of his own time: authors such as Herbert Spencer, G. H. Lewes, and John Stuart Mill, who were his main philosophical foes.⁹² In the introduction to Hume’s *Treatise*, Green opposes them indirectly, by claiming that LBH made the same mistakes as nineteenth-century empirical psychologists.⁹³ In later publications, Green confronts them directly. He does not question their empiricist view that all our knowledge and concepts derive from experience, but he criticizes their disregard for the contribution of the understanding to cognition.⁹⁴ Green does not contrast the views of LBH or their nineteenth-century followers with those of DSL, but with those of Kant, Hegel, and himself, who acknowledge the contribution of the understanding to cognition.

One may note that, although the empirical psychology criticized by Green does not entail the empiricist epistemology of the standard narrative, the two are natural allies. For this reason, those who accepted Green’s grouping and genealogy of LBH for their empirical psychology might have been favorably disposed to accept the narrative’s grouping and genealogy

⁸⁸ Green, “Introduction,” 267.

⁸⁹ See W. J. Mander, *British Idealism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 62. On the importance of the activity of the understanding, see, e.g., Thomas Hill Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, 5th ed., ed. A. C. Bradley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1906), §46. On the impossibility of conceiving of experience independently from that activity, see *ibid.*, §34. For Green’s dismissal of external world skepticism, see “Mr Herbert Spencer and Mr G. H. Lewes” [1877–79], in *Works*, 1:374, 376.

⁹⁰ Mander, *Idealism*, 69.

⁹¹ Green, “Introduction,” 13, 19, 165.

⁹² Mander, *Idealism*, 66.

⁹³ Green, “Introduction,” 7, 165.

⁹⁴ Klein, *Empiricism*, 52–62, 149; Mander, *Idealism*, 66–67.

of LBH for their empiricist epistemology. If so, Green had an indirect influence on the spread of the standard narrative. One might think that Green's influence was considerable, thanks to his prominent position as a teacher and, later, professor in Oxford and to the success of his edition of Hume's *Treatise*. Yet I have not found clear evidence that Green's influence in this respect was significant. To begin with, none of the authors mentioned in tables 3 and 4 (on page 275), who endorsed the standard narrative between 1895 and 1915, studied in Oxford with Green. Moreover, some of their works refer to Green's introduction in connection with LBH,⁹⁵ but several others do not.⁹⁶ Finally, regardless of whether they were influenced by Green's introduction, they might have taken up the grouping and genealogy of LBH from proponents of the standard account, to whom they owed their account of DSL's rationalism and the view that Kant synthesized empiricism and rationalism.

Although, as we have seen, Green did not elaborate the standard narrative of early modern philosophy, other works by German Hegelians and British idealists might have done so. The most likely candidates are their histories of philosophy. I will summarize the account of early modern thought that can be found in the histories of philosophy by Hegel, Erdmann, Schwegler, and, with minor variations, in Caird's monographs on Kant.⁹⁷

The account starts by declaring Bacon and Descartes "the founders of modern philosophy."⁹⁸ Bacon is described in conventional terms as "the herald of empiricism."⁹⁹ Descartes, who is given more importance than Bacon, is portrayed differently than in typical twentieth-century accounts. He is not the philosopher who made "epistemology the most basic sector of the whole of philosophy,"¹⁰⁰ unfolding a "pure inquiry"¹⁰¹ that provided

⁹⁵ See, e.g., Arthur Kenyon Rogers, *A Student's History of Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1901), 358, 398; Hibben, *Enlightenment*, 57, 84, 101, 110.

⁹⁶ See, e.g., Marvin, *Syllabus*; William Turner, *History of Philosophy* (Boston: Ginn, 1903); Cushman, *History*; A. W. Benn, *History of Modern Philosophy* (London: Watts, 1912).

⁹⁷ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1892–96), vol. 3; Johann Eduard Erdmann, *A History of Philosophy*, ed. Williston S. Hough (London: Allen & Unwin, 1889–90), vol. 2; Schwegler, *History*; Edward Caird, *A Critical Account of the Philosophy of Kant* (Glasgow: Maclehose, 1877); Caird, *The Critical Philosophy of Immanuel Kant* (Glasgow: Maclehose, 1889).

⁹⁸ Schwegler, *History*, 166.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁰⁰ Michael Dummett, *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, 2nd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1981), xxxiii.

¹⁰¹ Bernard Williams, *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry* (London: Penguin, 1978).

an a priori, rationalist foundation for basic truths about God, humans, and the world. Descartes's central problem, which is the central problem of modern philosophy, is overcoming the "opposition between Thought and Being," "subject and object," "Nature and Mind."¹⁰²

To that end, Descartes clears the ground from all prejudices and employs the *cogito* to assert the reality of thought. He then relies on God's veracity to prove the existence of the material world. He attempts to establish its unity with thought by embracing occasionalism and making God "the intermediate bond of union" between mind and body.¹⁰³ However, Descartes's substance dualism posits the "widest separation" between them, a gulf too wide to be overcome.¹⁰⁴ Spinoza, Descartes's "direct successor,"¹⁰⁵ removes this obstacle by rejecting substance dualism and building a monist system on Cartesian premises. In doing so, he reveals the most defining feature of Descartes's philosophy: not so much a rationalist stance, but a theocentric tendency that finds full expression in Spinoza's pantheism.¹⁰⁶

At this point, the standard narrative introduces Leibniz's philosophy as a further development within Descartes's and Spinoza's movement. The Hegelians, instead, see Spinoza as the last Cartesian. His pantheism paid too much attention to the whole as compared with the individual, eliciting an individualist reaction that took two forms: "a one-sided *idealism*, and a one-sided *realism*."¹⁰⁷ Schwegler and Erdmann, who simplify Hegel's periodization, place Leibniz and Berkeley among the idealists, Locke and Hume among the realists.

The Hegelians trace the development of the two forms of individualism, attempting to show that they both entail skepticism. They show how "the individual, conceived as immediately conscious of himself and of himself alone, is gradually driven to surrender all hold upon objective reality."¹⁰⁸ Kant saved philosophy from this skeptical shipwreck.¹⁰⁹ He synthesized realism with idealism, lifted "philosophy above" their "opposition,"¹¹⁰ and started the new age of German idealism.

This Hegelian narrative has some elements in common with the standard narrative. It sees Kant as the synthesizer of opposing tendencies and it

¹⁰² Hegel, *Lectures*, 2:106–7.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 3:251.

¹⁰⁴ Schwegler, *History*, 192.

¹⁰⁵ Hegel, *Lectures*, 3:252.

¹⁰⁶ Erdmann, *History*, 3:6.

¹⁰⁷ Schwegler, *History*, 193.

¹⁰⁸ Caird, *Critical Philosophy*, 84.

¹⁰⁹ Schwegler, *History*, 229.

¹¹⁰ Erdmann, *History*, 2:360.

acknowledges that Spinoza followed Descartes, while Hume followed Locke. However, the Hegelian narrative does not revolve around the empiricism/rationalism distinction. It cuts across the groupings and genealogies of DSL and LBH. It portrays Leibniz more as an individualistic opponent of Descartes's and Spinoza's pantheism than as their follower. The Hegelians note that Berkeley "followed the empiricism of Locke," but they stress that "we must place him in immediate succession" to Leibniz "as the perfecter of a subjective idealism."¹¹¹ The claim that the modern period was dominated by the contrast between individualism and pantheism, the theocentric interpretation of Descartes and Spinoza (but not Leibniz), the teleological reading of early modern thinkers as striving to establish the unity of mind and world make Hegelian histories significantly different from the standard narrative that is spelled out in the works of Tennemann, Fischer, Ueberweg, Falckenberg, and Windelband.¹¹² Far from elaborating the standard narrative, the account provided by German Hegelians and British idealists was alternative to it. The standard narrative had to *prevail* over the Hegelian narrative in order to become standard. When and why did this happen?

V. BECOMING STANDARD

The standard narrative became standard in the English-speaking world at the turn of the twentieth century, between 1895 and 1915. There are two sources of evidence for this claim. In the first place, many new introductions to philosophy and histories of philosophy that endorse the standard narrative were published in those years. Those listed in table 3 contrast the British or even English empiricism of LBH with the Continental rationalism of DSL. Those listed in table 4 also follow the standard narrative, although they diverge from it in minor ways or they fail to explicitly classify all six of LBH and DSL as either British empiricists or Continental rationalists. For instance, George Stuart Fullerton's list of main rationalists mentions Descartes and Spinoza, but not Leibniz.¹¹³ Russell's list in *The Problems of Philosophy* includes Descartes and Leibniz, but omits Spinoza.¹¹⁴ Hibben's

¹¹¹ Schwegler, *History*, 221.

¹¹² Tennemann, *Geschichte*; Tennemann, *Handbuch*; Fischer's works cited above; Friedrich Ueberweg, *A History of Philosophy*, trans. G. S. Morris (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1872–73); Falckenberg, *History*; Windelband, *History*.

¹¹³ George Stuart Fullerton, *An Introduction to Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1906), 206–8.

¹¹⁴ Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (New York: Holt, 1912), 41.

Year	Author	Title	Reprints/new editions
1895	Paulsen	<i>Introduction to Philosophy</i> (trans.)	1898, 1906, 1907
1897	Külpe	<i>Introduction to Philosophy</i> (trans.)	1901, 1904, 1910, 1915
1899	Marvin	<i>A Syllabus of an Introduction to Philosophy</i>	
1901	Rogers	<i>A Student's History of Philosophy</i>	1902, 1905, 1907, 1908, 1909, 1912, 1913, 1915
1902	Janet/Séailles	<i>A History of the Problems of Philosophy</i> (trans.)	
1903	Adamson	<i>The Development of Modern Philosophy</i>	1908
1903	Dewing	<i>Introduction to the History of Modern Philosophy</i>	
1911	Cushman	<i>A Beginner's History of Philosophy</i> , vol. 2	
1913	Fletcher	<i>An Introduction to Philosophy</i>	
1914	Thilly	<i>A History of Philosophy</i>	

TABLE 3: Introductions to philosophy and histories of philosophy published in English between 1895 and 1915 that distinguish between empiricism and rationalism and mention the two triads of empiricists and rationalists. The last column lists only the reprints and new editions published until 1915.

Year	Author	Title	Reprints/new editions
1896	Weber	<i>History of Philosophy</i> (trans.)	1897, 1898, 1899, 1901, 1903, 1904, 1905, 1907, 1908, 1909, 1912, 1914
1898	Hibben	<i>The Problems of Philosophy</i>	1899, 1900, 1906
1903	Marvin	<i>An Introduction to Systematic Philosophy</i>	1912
1903	Turner	<i>History of Philosophy</i>	
1906	Fullerton	<i>An Introduction to Philosophy</i>	1908
1910	Hibben	<i>The Philosophy of the Enlightenment</i>	
1912	Benn	<i>History of Modern Philosophy</i>	
1912	Russell	<i>The Problems of Philosophy</i>	

TABLE 4: Introductions to philosophy and histories of philosophy published in English between 1895 and 1915 that follow the standard narrative, but diverge from it in minor ways or fail to explicitly classify all six of LBH and DSL as empiricists or rationalists. The last column lists only the reprints and new editions published until 1915.

Philosophy of the Enlightenment is entirely in line with the standard narrative. However, being limited to the eighteenth century, it does not discuss Descartes and Spinoza.

In the second place, the early twentieth century saw a sharp decline in the popularity of Hegelian histories, which had provided the main alternative to the standard narrative in the late nineteenth century. The histories of modern philosophy by Erdmann, Hegel, and Schwegler had been reprinted at least 24 times between 1880 and 1899. Between 1900 and

1919, they were only reprinted seven times.¹¹⁵ Among the new histories of modern philosophy, many followed the standard narrative. None followed the Hegelian narrative.

The rise in the popularity of the standard narrative has three noteworthy features. To begin with, it was not limited to either Great Britain or the United States. New histories and introductions to philosophy that conformed to the standard narrative were published on both sides of the Atlantic.

Moreover, only a few of these texts were translations of German and French works.¹¹⁶ The number of translations was significantly lower than the number of works originally written in English. This indicates that the standard narrative was no longer mostly a German export. By and large, Anglophone writers had assimilated it. In 1908, the theologian Archibald Alexander still lamented: "Hitherto the Germans would seem to have had a monopoly in the writing of the history of philosophy. We have many admirable translations, but very few original treatises."¹¹⁷ In the 1920s, this complaint would no longer have been fair.

Finally, the standard narrative was spreading in classrooms as much as in textbooks. Not by chance, most of the texts listed in tables 3 and 4 are handy one- or two-volume manuals that were suitable for use in university courses. Their primary aim was to be useful pedagogical tools rather than to promote a specific philosophical outlook through their reading of the early modern period. By 1913, as we can read in the *Cyclopedia of Education*, "[c]ourses in special periods of modern philosophy such as Continental Rationalism (Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibnitz) or British Empiricism (Locke, Berkeley, and Hume)" were "given in most colleges having a developed department of philosophy."¹¹⁸ By now, the account based on the empiricism/rationalism distinction was really the standard account of early

¹¹⁵ The second volume of Erdmann's *History*, on pre-Kantian modern philosophy, was reprinted in 1909, 1913, and 1915. Hegel's *Lectures* and the British translation of Schwegler's textbook (*Handbook*) were not reprinted. The American translation of Schwegler's textbook (*History*) was reprinted in 1905, 1906, 1908, and 1913.

¹¹⁶ Friedrich Paulsen, *Introduction to Philosophy*, trans. Frank Thilly (New York: Holt, 1895); Alfred Weber, *History of Philosophy*, trans. Frank Thilly (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1896); Oswald Külpe, *Introduction to Philosophy*, trans. W. B. Pillsbury and E. B. Titchener (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1897); Paul Janet and Gabriel Séailles, *A History of the Problems of Philosophy*, ed. Henry Jones (London: Macmillan, 1902).

¹¹⁷ Archibald B. D. Alexander, review of Arthur Kenyon Rogers, *A Student's History of Philosophy*, *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Method* 5 (1908): 189.

¹¹⁸ Morris R. Cohen, "Philosophy," in *A Cyclopedia of Education*, ed. Paul Monroe (New York: Macmillan, 1913), 4:692.

modern philosophy. Until the 1980s, few scholars would question its accuracy.

What made it possible for the standard narrative to become standard in the early twentieth century? Its supporters will suggest that this was because the narrative is correct or, at least, more plausible than its competitors. In the light of the many recent criticisms of the standard narrative, this is a very controversial suggestion that would require at least a full paper to be assessed.

It is natural to think that the standard narrative became standard because its main competitor, the Hegelian account, lost prominence following the demise of British idealism. A pivotal year was 1903, “which saw the appearance of Russell’s *Principles of Mathematics*, as well as Moore’s *Principia Ethica* and ‘The Refutation of Idealism’, works which simultaneously attacked idealism and inaugurated the new ‘analytic’ philosophy.”¹¹⁹ However, W. J. Mander’s careful study of British idealism shows that its decline was slow and very gradual. F. H. Bradley and Bernard Bosanquet were still central figures up until World War I.¹²⁰ The decline of British idealism was beneficial to the success of the standard narrative. Even so, the Hegelian account of early modern thought lost popularity much more quickly than British idealism as a whole.

One reason for the success of the standard narrative is that it offered an attractive account of modern thought to those sympathetic with idealism who, even before the demise of their movement, were dissatisfied by the Hegelian narrative. There could be various reasons for this dissatisfaction. For instance, one could doubt the Hegelians’ claims that Locke’s philosophy is best seen as a reaction to Descartes’s and Spinoza’s pantheistic tendency or that Berkeley is best placed alongside Leibniz, as an exemplar of the idealist opposition to Locke’s and Hume’s realism, rather than alongside Locke and Hume. The standard narrative did not make those claims and had two additional advantages.

To begin with, it is simpler than the Hegelian narrative. A teacher who followed that narrative had to portray the development of pantheism from Descartes to Spinoza, describe the fortunes of the realistic individualism of Locke and Hume and the idealistic individualism of Leibniz and Berkeley, and finally explain how they gave rise to the idealism heralded by Kant. The standard narrative provided a simpler bipartition of early modern

¹¹⁹ Mander, *Idealism*, 526.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 526–56.

thought, along with a shorter canon comprising only six main authors. Their handy division into two groups of three authors each could be the basis for a simple two-part overview of early modern thought.

Moreover, the standard narrative could easily accommodate the Hegelian persuasion that historical developments unfold dialectically through theses, antitheses, and syntheses. On the macro-level, the standard narrative can be seen as singling out the rationalist thesis of DSL, the empiricist antithesis of LBH, and the Kantian synthesis. On the micro-level, the standard narrative can accommodate various Hegelian triads. For instance, one could portray Kant's philosophical development as a departure from his Leibnizian-Wolffian rationalism of the 1750s, through his Humean empiricism of the 1760s, to an idealist synthesis of rationalist and empiricist views. Hibben's *Philosophy of the Enlightenment* is a good example of how one can paint the standard narrative with Hegelian tones.

Being a Kantian or a Hegelian was no precondition for endorsing the standard narrative. Philosopher-psychologists such as William James or analytic philosophers such as Bertrand Russell, who were more sympathetic to Locke and Hume than to Kant or Hegel, could appropriate the *prima facie* factual component of the narrative while adjusting the evaluative component to suit their philosophical persuasions. For instance, Russell could criticize the errors of the rationalists, praise the advancements of empiricism from Locke to Hume, and portray the Kantian synthesis as an unfortunate interlude between the demise of Humean empiricism and the rise of analytic philosophy. To be sure, there may be many reasons to doubt the so-called factual component of the narrative. For instance, if we hold that Hume was, in the first place, an exponent of the skeptical movement sparked by Descartes's *Meditations* and developed by Gassendi, Foucher, and Bayle,¹²¹ it will be much harder to portray him as a precursor of Ayer than if we regard him as a successor of Locke. But issues concerning the correctness of this and other aspects of the standard narrative are far more likely to arise for those engaged in detailed exegetical work than for those, like Russell, who were looking for a ready-made account of early modern thought to bend to their purposes. The standard narrative was well suited to that end.

The adoption of the standard narrative by philosophers of very diverse persuasions did not begin with William James or the early analytic philosophers. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the narrative had been endorsed by Friedrich Ueberweg, a critic of idealism,¹²² by Ernest Belfort

¹²¹ Popkin, "Hume," 544.

¹²² Ueberweg, *History*.

Bax, who combined an idealist metaphysics with a Marxist social philosophy and an ethics indebted to Comte;¹²³ and by Alfred Weber, a French spiritualist who was influenced by positivism.¹²⁴ All of these authors regarded the standard narrative as correct, even though they rejected the Kant-inspired philosophies of its first proponents. The tendency of non-Kantian philosophers to appropriate the standard narrative continued well into the twentieth century. The most successful twentieth-century histories of philosophy, those by Bertrand Russell and Frederick Copleston, employed the standard narrative even though their authors had very different philosophical views and neither of them were Kantians.

I conclude that the standard narrative did not become standard in the nineteenth century, as scholars have claimed, but at the turn of the twentieth century. This was not due to the influence of Reid, German Hegelians, or British idealists, since they did not endorse the narrative, although Thomas Hill Green may have facilitated its uptake. The narrative is based on Kant's historiographical sketches, as corrected and integrated by Karl Leonhard Reinhold. It was first fleshed out into full-fledged histories by two Kantians, Wilhelm Gottlieb Tennemann and Johann Gottlieb Buhle. Numerous historians, several of whom were not Kantians, spread it in the English-speaking world. They include Kuno Fischer, Friedrich Ueberweg, Richard Falckenberg, and Wilhelm Windelband. However, the wide availability of their works did not suffice to make the narrative standard because, until the 1890s, the Hegelian account was at least as popular as theirs. Among the factors that allowed the narrative to become standard are its aptness to be adopted by philosophers of the most diverse persuasions, its simplicity and its suitability for teaching.

University of Warwick.

¹²³ Bax, *Handbook*.

¹²⁴ Weber, *History*.

APPENDIX: LIST OF WORKS CITED IN TABLES 1–4

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